

February Revolution, Outlines

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The [Russian Empire](#) collapsed with the abdication of [Emperor Nicholas II](#), and the old regime was replaced by a [provisional government](#) during the first revolution of February 1917 (March in the [Gregorian calendar](#); the older [Julian calendar](#) was in use in Russia at the time). In the second revolution that October, the Provisional Government was removed and replaced with a [communist state](#).

The [February Revolution](#) (March 1917) was a revolution focused around Petrograd (now [Saint Petersburg](#)), then capital of Russia. In the chaos, members of the Imperial parliament (the [Duma](#)) assumed control of the country, forming the [Russian Provisional Government](#). The army leadership felt they did not have the means to suppress the revolution, resulting in Nicholas's abdication. The [Soviets](#) (workers' councils), which were led by more radical socialist factions, initially permitted the Provisional Government to rule, but insisted on a prerogative to influence the government and control various militias. The February Revolution took place in the context of heavy military setbacks during the [First World War](#) (1914–18), which left much of the Russian Army in a state of mutiny.

A period of [dual power](#) ensued, during which the Provisional Government held state power while the national network of Soviets, led by socialists, had the allegiance of the lower classes and the [political left](#). During this chaotic period there were frequent mutinies, protests and many strikes. When the Provisional Government chose to continue fighting the war with Germany, the Bolsheviks and other socialist factions campaigned for stopping the conflict. The Bolsheviks turned workers militias under their control into the [Red Guards](#) (later the [Red Army](#)) over which they exerted substantial control.^[1]

February Revolution

At the beginning of February, [Petrograd](#) workers began several [strikes](#) and [demonstrations](#) ^[*citation needed*] **On 7 March [O.S. 22 February]**, workers at [Putilov](#), Petrograd's largest industrial plant, announced a strike.^[13]

The next day, a series of meetings and rallies were held for [International Women's Day](#), which gradually turned into economic and political gatherings. Demonstrations were organised to demand [bread](#), and these were supported by the industrial working force who considered them a reason for continuing the strikes. The women workers marched to nearby factories bringing out over 50,000 workers on strike.^[14] By 10 March [O.S. 25 February], virtually every industrial enterprise in Petrograd had been shut down, together with many commercial and service enterprises. Students, white-collar workers and teachers joined the workers in the streets and at public meetings.^[*citation needed*]

To quell the riots, the Tsar looked to the army. At least 180,000 troops were available in the capital, but most were either untrained or injured. Historian [Ian Beckett](#) suggests around 12,000 could be regarded as reliable, but even these proved reluctant to move in on the crowd, since it included so many women. It was for this reason that when, on 11 March [[O.S.](#) 26 February], the Tsar ordered the army to suppress the rioting by force, troops began to mutiny.^[15] Although few actively joined the rioting, many officers were either shot or went into hiding; the ability of the garrison to hold back the protests was all but nullified, symbols of the Tsarist regime were rapidly torn down around the city, and governmental authority in the capital collapsed – not helped by the fact that Nicholas had prorogued the Duma that morning, leaving it with no legal authority to act. The response of the Duma, urged on by the liberal bloc, was to establish a Temporary Committee to restore law and order; meanwhile, the socialist parties establish the Petrograd Soviet to represent workers and soldiers. The remaining loyal units switched allegiance the next day.^[16]

The Tsar took a train back towards Petrograd, which was stopped on 14 March [[O.S.](#) 1 March],^[15] by a group of disloyal troops. When the Tsar finally reached his destination, the Army Chiefs and his remaining ministers (those who had not fled under pretense of a power-cut) suggested in unison that he abdicate the throne.^[citation needed] **He did so on 15 March [[O.S.](#) 2 March]**, on behalf of himself, and then, having taken advice, on behalf of his son, the [Tsarevich](#).^[15] Nicholas nominated his brother, the [Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich](#), to succeed him. But the Grand Duke realised that he would have little support as ruler, so he declined the crown on 16 March [[O.S.](#) 3 March],^[15] stating that he would take it only if that was the consensus of democratic action.^[17] Six days later, Nicholas, no longer Tsar and addressed with contempt by the sentries as "Nicholas Romanov", was reunited with his family at the [Alexander Palace](#) at [Tsarskoye Selo](#).^[18] He was placed under [house arrest](#) with his family by the Provisional Government.

The immediate effect of the February Revolution was a widespread atmosphere of elation and excitement in Petrograd.^[19] On 16 March [[O.S.](#) 3 March], a [provisional government](#) was announced. The center-left was well represented, and the government was initially chaired by a liberal aristocrat, [Prince Georgy Yevgenievich Lvov](#), a member of the [Constitutional Democratic party](#) (KD).^[20] The socialists had formed their rival body, the [Petrograd Soviet](#) (or workers' council) four days earlier. The Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government competed for power over Russia.

For more detail, see: [February Revolution](#)

See also: [July Days](#)

MIA 1917 Timeline (extract):

- Feb 14** The strike called by the Bolsheviks continues, while a [Menshevik](#) called strike begins to show support for the Duma at Taurida Palace (as opposed to the Tsar), which opens a new session. 90,000 workers are on strike, from 58 different factories. Police attempt to arrest demonstrators, but they fight the police back. No workers march on Taurida Palace, as the Mensheviks had hoped. The Bolshevik Petrograd Committee calls on workers to overthrow the Tsar.
- Feb 22** The Tsar leaves for the General Headquarters in Mogilev. Meanwhile, the bosses of the Putilov Plant lock-out striking workers.
- Feb 23** The [February Revolution](#) begins, ignited by International Women's Day. Militant women textile workers, many of whom are soldiers' wives, initiate a massive strike in Petrograd, despite the protests of their own union leadership. 128,000 workers take to the streets, and among their chief demands is an end to the [World War](#) and an increase in food. Bourgeois history recounts this organized movement as "Bread riots".
- Feb 24** The strike doubles in size to around 200,000 workers. Nearly half of all industrial workers in Petrograd are on strike. The new demands of the strike shift heavily towards overthrowing the autocracy and putting an end to the war. Striking workers fraternize with soldiers and cossacks, while bitterly hating the police.
- Feb 25** Vyborg (Bolshevik) workers break into police stations and cut the telephones to Government offices. Armed clashes with the police occur, with many killed and wounded. Meanwhile, Empress Alexandra writes to Nicholas II: *"This is a hooligan campaign, with boys and girls running about shouting that they have no bread... all this will surely pass."* General Khabalov (Commander of the Petrograd District), acting under the Tsar's orders, threatens that he will use any means necessary to ban all demonstrations.
- Feb 26** Early Sunday morning, the police launch wide scale arrests of over 100 leaders of revolutionary organisations, including the Bolsheviks. General Khabalov's soldiers, acting under the Tsar's orders, open fire on striking workers. 169 workers are killed, and over 1,000 people are injured. By 4 pm, the 4th company of the Pavlovsky Regiment, outraged that part of their regiment fired on workers, rushes into the street to subdue them. On the way, police try to stop the company, and a fire fight ensues. General Khabalov orders the company to disarm; some soldiers refuse and join the protestors. Bolshevik workers in the Vyborg district plan to push events into an armed uprising.

Feb 27

Bolshevik agitators visit with soldiers of the Volynsky Regiment with the intention of merely starting a good relationship. Before noon, the soldiers decide to kill the commander of the company that fired on demonstrators the previous day. The soldiers arm themselves, and spread the agitation throughout their entire Regiment. By afternoon, the Litovsky and Preobrazhensky Regiments join this new army, and they storm the Main Arsenal, liberating 40,000 rifles. Fully armed, they move on to liberate political prisoners from Kresty jail.

By nightfall, 66,000 men of the Petrograd garrison — a day ago ordered to fire on striking workers — have now *joined* the striking workers, fully armed! The Bolsheviks continue agitating for the creation of a new government, and the elected delegates (workers, peasants and soldiers) of the Petrograd [Soviet](#) arrive at Taurida Palace, creating the [Executive Committee](#). While the Bolshevik rank and file had been incredibly successful at creating a revolutionary movement, they were unable to get good results in elections to the Soviet. The Mensheviks and [SRs](#), who promise everything under the sun, fair much better. Both parties believe the current revolution needs to be [capitalist](#), before the nation can move into Socialism in the unforeseen future (a political theory called [stagism](#)). The Menshevik [N.S. Chkheidze](#) becomes leader of the Soviet.

Meanwhile, the wheels of the old order keep turning. Rodzianko asks the Duma to convene to resolve on a course of action. The group creates a [Provisional Committee](#), which urgently asks the Tsar to save himself by sharing power with a Prime Minister. The Tsar refuses.

Feb 28

The revolutionary masses seize the city of Moscow. The Tsar's Ministers are arrested. The Provisional Committee assumes control of the Army, while the Kronstadt sailors mutiny against their officers. The first issue of [Izvestia](#) is published; a newspaper of the Petrograd Soviet.

Mar 1

The first Joint Plenum of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies issues [Soviet Order No. 1](#): all soldiers' units will elect Soldiers' Committees. The decree stipulates that soldiers will now accept orders from the Soldiers' Soviet and their locally elected committees. The Soviet also forbids its members from joining the soon to form government, but recognizes the authority of the Duma.

March 2 The Soviet and Duma continue discussions on the formation of a new government. At the Soviet Plenum, the Bolsheviks criticize the lack of focus on questions of land, peace, and the 8 hour day. On the request of the Provisional Committee, **Nicholas II abdicates power** to his brother Mikhail, who refuses power. Thus ends their hopes to keep the monarchy alive, side by side to the new [Provisional Government](#). Workers, soldiers, and young people take to the streets, tearing down statues of the Tsar, and set alight the Imperial emblems. Loyalist police ambush and shoot the revellers, but armed Soviet soldiers hunt the police down and arrest them. Whenever a cop is uncovered in the middle of a crowd, however, their fate is more severe.

March 3 The Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet orders the arrest of Nicholas II.

March 5 The first issue of [Pravda](#) is published, since being closed down as a result of its peaceful stance on the World War.

March 6 The Provisional Government declares a general amnesty for all political prisoners.

March 8 The Petrograd Soviet creates the [Contact Commission](#) as an organ of communication with the Provisional Government. Meanwhile, the Provisional Government refuses to allow Finland the independence it demands.